



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF COLLIN COUNTY
www.lwvcollin.org

Nonpartisan

VOTERS GUIDE

May 24, 2016
Primary Runoff Election
Collin County Offices

Early voting: May 16-20

Election Day: May 24 – Polls open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

About this Voters Guide

This *Voters Guide* is published by the League of Women Voters of Collin County to help citizens prepare to cast an informed vote. The League of Women Voters encourages informed and active participation in government. The League does not support or oppose any political party or candidate.

Questionnaires were sent to all candidates who will appear on the ballot. Candidates' replies were subject to a character limit and are printed without editing or verification. If a candidate did not respond by the Voters Guide deadline, then "No response received" is printed. Later responses may appear at www.VOTE411.org. Candidates were asked to avoid references to their opponents. Photos are included for candidates who provided them.

This guide is available online at www.LWVCollin.org, along with a Voter Information Guide with general information about qualifications for voting, what to take to the polls, vote by mail, and helpful websites.



To see all races for your address, visit www.VOTE411.org.

WHEN & WHERE TO VOTE

For Collin County voting locations, hours, and a sample ballot, visit http://www.collincountytx.gov/elections/election_information or call 972-547-1990 (McKinney).

Table of Contents

	<i>Pages</i>
District Judge	2-3
Justice of the Peace	4-5

You may bring this *Voters Guide* into the voting booth! In 1995, the Texas law prohibiting use of printed materials, such as this *Voters Guide*, in the polling place was ruled unconstitutional (*Texas Election Code, Section 61.011*)

Your vote is your voice. Be heard.

League of Women Voters is a Nonpartisan Organization

The LWV never supports or opposes candidates for office or political parties, and any use of the League of Women Voters name in campaign advertising or literature has not been authorized by the League.

District Judge

4 year term. Must be 25 years or older, a U.S. citizen, a practicing lawyer, a resident of Texas, and a resident of the district represented. Responsible for cases including felony criminal cases, civil cases with higher amounts of controversy, and family law matters.

QUESTIONS

New Courts: How will the addition of 2 new district courts in Collin County affect case loads and access to the courts by county residents?

Access to Justice: What, if anything, should be done to improve access to justice for low income residents in civil and criminal cases?

Balance: What is your view on balancing mercy and justice?

Impartiality: How do you maintain impartiality, given the necessity of raising funds for political campaigns?

Other Issues: What other issues do you believe will be most pressing in the District Courts, and how would you address them?

416th District Judge, Michael Puhl (Republican Party)



Contact Information:

Michael@myfamilylawyer.net
(972) 569-3166

Website/Facebook/YouTube:

puhlforjudge.com
www.facebook.com/michael.puhl.1612

Education: BS Business Administration, Chicago State University (1977) Juris Doctorate, The John Marshall University (1982)

Experience: 34 years of continuous legal experience. I have practiced in all areas of law that will be considered by this court. I am board certified in family law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization. Managing partner in several small to med-sized firms.

New Courts: The addition of 2 new district courts will contribute greatly to relieve the backlog of cases in the county. Statistically, the average number of cases filed per district judge in Collin County is among the highest in the State. Higher caseloads translate to longer delays to receive court hearings. The addition of these courts will save County residents millions of dollars in attorneys fees by expediting the conclusion of cases and more efficient and effective manner.

Access to Justice: The challenge and cost of developing and maintaining a quality, cost-effective indigent defense system that meets the needs of our local community and requirements of the Constitution and state law is staggering. Since eliminating indigent defense is not an option we must create better efficiencies within the system. These efficiencies should include (1) prompt determination of indigence ASAP (2) prompt appointment of counsel to those confined to state custody; (3) the establishment of a reasonable fee schedule for the payment of appointed attorneys; and (4) the prompt disposition of cases.

Balance: When it comes to justice and mercy the quest is to achieve balance and perspective while wrestling with complicated human issues often set on a foundation of self-contradictions.

On these issues I am inclined to consider and follow the Rotary 4-Way Test in daily living of the things I think, say or do. The test: Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill? Will it be beneficial to all concerned. Repeatedly meting out harsh consequences may be in vogue, but it is not a cure for social ills. Tolerance and forgiveness often require greater courage.

Impartiality: I recognize that politicizing judicial elections poses a definite threat to a court's impartiality. There is increasing pressure on candidates to follow donor's or political views rather than their own best judgment. Though there is no foolproof method to assure the character and integrity of a judge, I know that I must remain vigilant and monitor myself to assure that I remain fair and impartial and true to my faith and the moral principles I have been raised with. I must constrain myself to perform my duties in a manner that justifies public faith and confidence in the courts.

Other Issues: Though there is much to be proud of, the most pressing issue facing our local district courts is the expanding rift among judges and local political officials over judicial decisions which affect local political issues. This "elephant in the room" seriously threatens the impartiality of judges and, in turn, has the

potential to undermine public faith and confidence in the courts. In addition to relying on my faith and moral principles, I hope to use my age, experience, established relationships,

and reputation as a consensus builder to both address and aggressively pursue positive solutions.

416th District Judge, Andrea Thompson (Republican Party)



Contact Information:

Andrea4Texas@gmail.com
(972) 679-5090

Website/Facebook/YouTube:

www.Andrea4Texas.com
www.facebook.com/Andrea4Texas

Education: I attended Plano Senior High School, then received a BS from Texas A&M University before receiving my JD from South Texas College of Law in Houston.

Experience: I served as Collin County District Clerk from December 2011 - December 2015. Prior to that I was an attorney practicing in the area of family law with my own law firm from 2003 - 2011 when the District Judges asked me to serve as District Clerk.

New Courts: Family law cases are more than 50% of the cases filed in Collin County. There are twice as many family law cases filed as criminal and almost twice as many family law as civil cases. The addition of 2 new courts that only hear family law cases should help residents access the courts faster, but only if the existing courts continue to hear family law cases at a higher percentage than what they are currently. With my family law background I would be able to immediately take a larger percentage of family law cases and help residents have faster access to the courts.

Access to Justice: Improving access to justice is our duty and it improves court efficiency. As an attorney, I provided hundreds of hours of free & discounted services to clients. I am currently a member of the Texas Guide & File team working to develop and provide free online forms for legal filings. This program will walk self represented litigants through legal forms and then electronically file them with the court. Judges are leaders and as a judge I can encourage broader access to out of court settlement options in civil matters and develop a larger pool of attorneys to defend the indigent in criminal cases.

Balance: My family law clients often faced behavior by the other spouse that was devastating to their family. In discussing their choices in how to respond, we discussed whether the action was morally wrong or illegal. Infidelity is immoral, it isn't illegal. The

injured spouse may feel angry, but retribution may not be best for the children. Mercy and justice sit in a similar balance. Our laws demand justice, which is decided by a finding of guilt or fault. Yet mercy may be served by the length of a sentence or the amount of a judgment based on weighing the specific facts of a case.

Impartiality: Unfortunately in Texas we elect our judiciary and campaigns cost money but there are voluntary limits to contributions which I have chosen to accept so that no 1 special interest group or law firm may contribute enough to decide the outcome of my election or give the appearance of impropriety. In fact, my campaign is mostly funded by my friends and family, with 36% of my donations coming from retirees, 41% from friends still working and only 23% from attorneys.

Other Issues: In Collin County, two family law cases are filed for every criminal or civil case and the number of family law cases is growing at twice the rate of civil or criminal cases. Few of us know someone affected by violent crime, but we all know someone affected by a family law matter. We need judges who understand the complexities and both sides of cases involving family violence, child support obligations, divorce, adoption and CPS. I have dedicated my career to these complex problems and finding solutions that preserve families and their finances. We have a need—my experience is the solution.

Justice of the Peace

4 year term. Must be 18 years or older, a U.S. citizen, a resident of Texas, and a resident of the district represented. Responsible for civil cases and criminal misdemeanor cases punishable by fine only.

QUESTIONS

Processes: What changes, if any, are needed in court processes in your precinct?

Poverty/Homelessness: What are the effects of poverty and homelessness on Justice of the Peace cases, and how would you address them?

Accessibility: The JP Courts are often referred to as "The People's Courts." What measures do you support to make the JP courts more accessible to the people?

Impartiality: How do you maintain impartiality, given the necessity of raising funds for political campaigns?

Other Issues: What other issues do you believe will be most pressing for the county Justice of the Peace courts, and how would you address them?

Justice of the Peace, Pct. 3, Pl. 1, Thomas Hayden (Republican Party)

No photo
provided

Contact Information:

tk.hayden131@yahoo.com

Website/Facebook/YouTube:

None provided

Education: J.D. at the Michigan State University College of Law, M.A. in Political Science-Constitutional Law at the University of Texas at Dallas, B.A. in Political Science at the University of Texas at Dallas

Experience: I have worked in higher education for the last year and a half, after completing my Juris Doctor.

Processes: All too often, people are eager to suggest improvements from outside of a system, without understanding the complex factors that are involved. In looking at any process, one area that can almost always be improved is making things more efficient. More-efficient processes are not only more accessible, but also cost less to operate.

Poverty/Homelessness: Poverty has long been acknowledged to have a negative effect on education. Education and knowledge of laws are often directly linked. When people are unaware of the extent of the rule of law, they find themselves unable to adequately protect their rights. To address this, I would and do encourage people to continue to take the initiative in enhancing their own education, and not to believe everything they see on television.

Accessibility: The measure that I most support to make the JP courts more accessible to the people is to avoid physically locking the public out of the courtroom.

Impartiality: The easiest way to maintain impartiality is to not accept funds for a political campaign, as I have committed to doing. The "necessity" of raising funds for campaigns is a symptom of a sickened electoral system; in some instances raising funds is acceptable, but it is never "necessary."

Other Issues: The most pressing issue for any justice, judge, or arbitrator is equality under the law. "All men are created equal," and the law exists to "protect the rights of the smallest minority that has ever existed - the individual."

Justice of the Peace, Pct. 3, Pl. 1, Chuck Ruckel (Republican Party)



Contact Information:

ruckel202@hotmail.com

Website/Facebook/YouTube:

www.facebook.com/Re-Elect-Chuck-Ruckel-for-Justice-of-the-Peace-119823634798101

Education: BS Engineering, UT - Austin; MS Management, UT - Dallas; Sam Houston State University - Leadership & Command College; Leadership Plano Class IV; Registered Professional Engineer; Master Peace Officer; Over 200 hours of Judicial training.

Experience: 3 years as Justice of the Peace, Precinct 3-1; Approximately 25 years with the Collin County Sheriff's Office retiring as the head of the Field Operations Division.

Experienced in management, budgeting, and solving complex problems.

Processes: Justice Court is still a paper system in an electronic world. It is imperative that we move these courts into the 21 century. We will always need to allow paper filings, reports, and evidence but our Court can be much more efficient by using technologies and software that are available.

Poverty/Homelessness: Most of our eviction cases are due to non-payment of rent. Often this occurs because the occupants have fallen on hard economic times due largely to loss of employment, illness, or divorce. After eviction, many of these people become homeless. Churches and non-profit organizations could become more proactive in helping in the short term preventing some of the homelessness.

Accessibility: Education is the key to accessibility. Many citizens do not know what the Justice of the Peace even does other than marriages. It is the "People's Court" because an average citizen can plead their case at a very low cost and seek "justice" for any dispute as long as the amount in question is \$10,000 or less. There are also a number of other services that are available. Some of these include mental warrants, occupational driver's

license, hot checks, and truancy. Justice Courts hear all criminal cases that are fine only. We need to increase access to technology and simplify the filing process.

Impartiality: The most important role for a Judge is to remain impartial while conducting Court. The sanctions for a Judge that shows favoritism are harsh and swift. While all Judges understand this, I believe it is the moral fiber of the individual that allows them to maintain their integrity and impartiality. I would not compromise my core beliefs for a campaign contribution.

Other Issues: Staff and staff pay – All Collin County justice Courts have small, efficient staffs. These staff members are expected to know the law, work with citizens, Courts, lawyers, law enforcement, DA's, and numerous others all without making any mistakes. Yet, they are paid as an entry-level position. If the clerks were fairly compensated, there would be less employee turnover. Turnover is not only expensive and time consuming, it is frustrating for the citizens. Court Security – Justice Court security is lacking and must be improved.

Your vote is your voice. Be heard.